



Green Cincinnati Plan  
2023

# Equity Framework



# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all members of the Green Cincinnati Plan (GCP) Equity Committee who convened for nine months throughout 2022 to lead the integration of equity into the GCP process and written product. All members brought their own unique perspectives, engaged thoughtfully and passionately, and persisted until the GCP became a product we could be proud of. Many will continue to lead into implementation, and for this, we are grateful.

## Equity Committee

Ashlee Young, Chair\*

*Interact for Health*

Tyeisha Cole\*

*Green Umbrella*

Marisha Davis

*Meiser's Fresh Grocery & Deli*

Derrick Feagin

*South Cumminsville Community Council*

Darryl Franklin

*North Fairmount*

Kelsey Hawkins-Johnson\*

*Groundwork Ohio River Valley*

Phillip Marshall

*South Cumminsville*

Ryan Mooney-Bullock

*Green Umbrella*

Margaux Roberts

*Groundwork Ohio River Valley*

Molly Robertshaw\*

*Office of Environment & Sustainability*

Savannah Sullivan\*

*Green Umbrella*

Carlie Trott, Ph.D.

*University of Cincinnati*

Flequer Vera

*Sustainergy Cooperative*

Tanner Yess

*Groundwork Ohio River Valley*

\*Equity Core Team Member

While not all encompassing and far from perfect, the Equity Framework that follows aims to serve as both a record and a guide. We hope you find it helpful.

## A Word from Ashlee Young, Equity Committee Chair

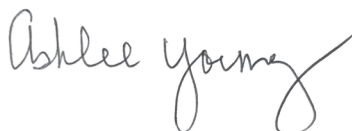
It has been my honor to serve as the Equity Committee Chair for the Green Cincinnati Plan. One of the greatest challenges facing our community is climate change. Often when we talk about climate change, the language we use is not accessible to everyone and it doesn't center those most impacted. Like other issues in our community, climate impacts are not created equally or distributed equally, many of them disproportionately impact our Black and Brown communities, and communities with low wealth. It is important that we are deliberate about reducing those impacts.

What excites me most about the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan is the intentionality of embedding equity into the process and plan with an explicit focus on racial equity.

It is up to all of us to hold our community accountable for how the plan is developed and implemented. Every step of the way, it will be important to assess who will benefit and who will be burdened by the decisions we make. We see this intentional focus from the federal government with Justice40 and it is our time as a community to put this commitment into practice through implementation and budgetary processes.

Accountability lies with all of us. So, the next time you are asked to be involved in any effort, think about who will benefit from this decision and who will be burdened. Are those most impacted at the table? And, not only that, but are they leading and deciding what is best for their community? The choice is ours. As a city, we can do the hard work now or we can suffer the consequences of having the same patterns repeated, causing further harm to our communities.

If we want to see real change, we must do things differently. Doing things differently is being intentional about creating a community-driven process for climate action planning. Investing in and supporting the leadership, knowledge, and expertise of those most impacted by any aspects of climate change will be needed to create community solutions that work.



EQUITY COMMITTEE CHAIR



EQUITY COMMITTEE CHAIR

Ashlee Young

ORGANIZATION

Vice President of Policy & Engagement, Interact for Health





# Equity Framework

Integrating equity into the process and product of the GCP

## Introduction

The Green Cincinnati Plan (GCP) Equity Framework is an evolving guide to support integration of equity in the climate action planning and implementation process. It is an evolving tool because we continue to learn and adapt—the process of integrating equity is iterative, not linear. Cincinnati is on a learning journey toward climate justice. This piece’s aim is to document a vision for equity for the Green Cincinnati Plan and to support all involved in implementing the GCP with a common vision and language as we all work to intentionally navigate this complex territory toward purposeful and accountable action.



Volunteers conduct spring planting in Mt. Echo Park. Photo courtesy of Cincinnati Parks.

## Our Commitment to Equity

As a public statement of collective commitment to the integration of equity, the GCP Steering Committee adopted the following Equity Commitment Statement on 9/15/22:

### **GCP Equity Commitment**

The Green Cincinnati Plan (GCP) is committed to equity—with an explicit focus on racial equity. We acknowledge Cincinnati’s demographic makeup and our history of injustices. We believe that we will be better able to create an environment where all Cincinnatians can thrive by explicitly centering race in our efforts. The GCP will have an intentional focus on addressing the needs of those people and communities who experience elevated burdens from climate change and on an equitable distribution of benefits moving forward.

We commit to embedding racial equity throughout the engagement process, written product, and implementation of the Green Cincinnati Plan to ensure accountability and impact.

This statement and the collective honesty and buy-in that it embodies will continue to guide and inform all involved in the Green Cincinnati Plan moving forward.

## **Common Language**

Using similar terms and understanding their meanings matters, especially in collaborative work. As a result, the Green Cincinnati Plan presents the following definitions:

**Equity**<sup>1</sup>—just and fair inclusion in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. In sustainability work, equity must be recognitional, procedural, distributional, restorational, and transformational.

**Racial Equity**<sup>2</sup>—an outcome in which “race no longer determines one’s socioeconomic outcomes...As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity” can fully participate in the development of “institutional policies and practices that impact their lives”

There are five types of equity<sup>3</sup> as identified in the GCP’s definition of equity:

- 1. Recognitional equity**—a commitment to identifying and acknowledging injustices affecting specific populations that institutions, including government, have created.
- 2. Procedural equity**—a commitment to ensuring that priority community members have a voice in the process to develop and implement

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from definitions provided by PolicyLink, USDN, and Green Umbrella. Approved by the GCP Steering Committee 9/15/22

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the Center for Social Inclusion and Race Forward. As shared with the GCP Steering Committee on 5/26/22

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Green Umbrella’s presentation to the Steering Committee on 5/26/22.

programs and policies in an effort to shift power, build trust, and drive accountability.

- 3. Distributional equity**—a commitment to develop policies and programs that result in the distribution of benefits across all segments of a community, prioritizing those with the highest need.
- 4. Restorational equity**—a commitment to correct past harms through repairing degraded relationships, communities, and other resources.
- 5. Transformational equity** - a commitment to prioritize the needs and rights of priority communities by addressing the structural conditions that cause social and racial injustice.



A group of youth enjoy a ride on a local trail  
Photo courtesy of Red Bike.

As the City works to operationalize the climate equity strategies of the GCP, a common language and approach to prioritizing communities hit first and worst by the climate crisis is needed. In climate equity work, communities are referred to by many different terms—frontline, disadvantaged, under-resourced, minority, low-income, and more. In this Plan, the term “Priority Communities” is used to communicate the essence of these various terms, and

signal the importance of elevating these communities’ needs based on a nuanced approach that is supported by both data and lived experience.

**Priority Communities**—those communities where climate mitigation and efforts to close gaps are likely to be most impactful due to historic and systematic discrimination, vulnerability to climate related events and disasters, and capacity to adapt to these challenges.

The criteria and methods for determining prioritization will vary based on the strategy being implemented, the focus of the implementing partner, and other factors. The “Integrating Equity in Implementation” section later in this document aims to provide general guidance for consideration.

## Integrating Equity in the GCP Process

In addition to the agreed upon definitions and adopted commitment above, which led to the development of a common understanding and purpose, practical tools were developed to help operationalize the integration of equity throughout the plan development process. Below are some sample tools. Some of the tools referenced can be viewed in an expanded format in the GCP Appendix.

### Guiding

Various iterations of the questions listed below were utilized in community meetings. These can also be helpful for implementation planning.

- What is the community context (residents, culture, history) that must be considered?
- Who experiences the benefits of the decisions, projects, policies or practices? Who experiences the burdens?
- How have historical and structural decisions contributed to the current state?
- How will you ensure that you have the right mix of people involved?

### Benchmarking

In an effort to inform all involved on everything from definitions to best practices and possible strategies, Green Umbrella produced an Equity Benchmarking Report<sup>4</sup> at the City's request in order to more deeply understand ways other cities across the country are actively embracing equity as a design and implementation principle. The report also included an Equity Matrix<sup>5</sup> which is a national scan of policies and programs from other similar efforts that could apply in Cincinnati.

### Including

In both leadership structure and engagement efforts, equity was a core design principle. In addition to the Equity Committee, examples of this integration include:

- A Steering Committee comprised of leaders intentionally representative of our City's demographics.
- Each Focus Area leadership team included an Equity Liaison.

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<sup>4</sup> 2022 Climate Equity Benchmarking Analysis Report. Green Umbrella. <https://greenumbrella.org/resources/Documents/benchmark2022.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Equity Benchmarking Matrix (2022). Green Umbrella. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TjDGR9701L1UcQuiPHe-baseKfd9KVjB/view?usp=sharing>.

- All community meetings held in community spaces accessible by public transit.

Another key mechanism for “including” was the Climate Safe Community Series. This series, an adaptation of the Climate Safe Neighborhoods effort, allowed Groundwork Ohio River Valley, Green Umbrella, and the Office of Environment & Sustainability to pilot an approach for residents of priority communities to share their neighborhood-level expertise, craft a vision for their community, and provide recommendations for the 2023 GCP. Across four sessions during the summer of 2022, more than 225 residents of 11 priority communities gathered to engage and share their lived experiences. All attendees were compensated for their time and received child care, if needed. Nearly 300 ideas were shared to improve the sustainability, equity, and resilience of these priority communities. All were given consideration in the development of the goals, strategies, and actions that came forth in the 2023 GCP.



Residents of the Beekman Corridor contribute local experiences of climate change and potential solutions. Photo courtesy of Groundwork Ohio River Valley.

## Refining

As Focus Area teams got into developing key portions of their action plans, an Equity Assessment Tool<sup>6</sup> was developed to support the vetting and improving of the vision, goals, strategies, and actions.

In addition, ahead of finalization of the Focus Area Action Plans, an

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<sup>6</sup> GCP Racial Equity Assessment Tool (2022). City of Cincinnati OES. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YkhW2gB5UUSm8Hfr9B\\_Qz9AjMpnSambq/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YkhW2gB5UUSm8Hfr9B_Qz9AjMpnSambq/view?usp=sharing)



Alignment Assessment Exercise was collectively conducted by leaders across the process to understand how priority actions align with equity and other stated priorities of the Plan. Results of this exercise can be viewed in the tables of actions in each Focus Area section of the Plan.

By utilizing the established commitment, common language, engagement strategies, and tools for integration, every attempt was made to weave equity into the process as well as development of the Vision, Goals, Strategies, and Actions that make up the crux of the Plan. While not perfect, these efforts and those still to come will evolve as the GCP comes to life.



Local residents discuss and contribute ideas in a community meeting fall 2022. Photo courtesy of City of Cincinnati.

## Integrating Equity in Implementation

The local impacts of climate change—including heat, erosion, and flooding—impact our neighborhoods differently. Therefore, it is key that implementing partners consider and incorporate an equity lens in the planning and implementation of GCP strategies. That said, uncovering the “where?” and “for/with whom?” for each GCP strategy involves great complexity and requires great nuance. In short, the process for determining which communities and residents to prioritize will vary—there is not a prescribed approach or formula. Luckily, though, there are many on a similar path and some best practices and tools are emerging.

As the GCP’s constellation of partners (“Champions”) work to strategically prioritize where and how to implement the action plans, leadership of the GCP would recommend consideration of a concept called **Targeted Universalism**. This approach acknowledges that while universal goals or policies aim to provide the same benefits and protections for all resi-

dents, these more universal approaches can actually end up deepening inequalities in certain demographic groups. These unintended consequences can be avoided and equitable impacts can be amplified through Targeted Universalism—where universal goals are achieved through strategic, targeted approaches.<sup>7</sup>

Concrete efforts that can and should inform the integration of equity into the implementation of the GCP include:

## Climate Safe Neighborhoods

Climate Safe Neighborhoods (CSN) is “a national effort through Groundwork USA to identify neighborhoods that are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change because of racial and social injustices, spread awareness and educate residents in those neighborhoods, and ignite action towards climate resilience.” Since 2021, Groundwork Ohio River Valley, in partnership with Green Umbrella and the City’s Office of Environment and Sustainability, developed neighborhood CSN Climate Advisory Groups to identify solutions to address extreme heat and flooding. Through intentional engagement with residents in priority communities, community members serve as the central subject matter experts in identifying local issues and co-creating community-based solutions. Residents are compensated for their work and the goal is to develop neighborhood resilience maps, which serve as a platform for activating the residents’ vision and as a tool to advocate for resources. As of early 2023, 8 neighborhoods and 38 resident leaders have created Climate Resilience Plans<sup>8</sup> with more on the horizon in 2023 and beyond.

## Justice40 Initiative

The federal government’s Justice40 Initiative<sup>9</sup>. Justice40 aims “to bring resources to communities most impacted by climate change, pollution, and environmental hazards” by making “...it a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits...flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened.”<sup>10</sup> This dynamic, cross-departmental effort across the federal government is actively developing tools, criteria, and more to support its implementation. The leadership of the GCP recommends tight alignment of efforts with this emerging, federal initiative.

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<sup>7</sup> 2022 Climate Equity Benchmarking Analysis Report. Green Umbrella. <https://greenumbrella.org/resources/Documents/benchmark2022.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Climate Safe Resilience Plans. (2021-22). Climate Safe Neighborhoods. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JmTqg7MCSuCPC7FeJhs546JlqCT7wiRM/ClimateSafeResiliencePlans.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Justice40 Factsheet (2022). Justice40 Collective. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6142a05674d68a2072918ee1/t/616f53b633c6c4576ca14d59/163468588>

<sup>10</sup> Justice40: A Whole Government Initiative (2022). The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>



Aiken High School students learn by doing in their agriculture program. Photo courtesy Cincinnati Public Schools.

At the printing of this report, the best available resources for GCP implementation partners to consider “where?” and “for/with whom?” efforts should be targeted to enhance equity include the following:

## Local

- **Cincinnati Climate Equity Indicators Report (2021)**  
[https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/sites/oes/assets/File/Climate%20Equity%20Indicators%20Report\\_2021.pdf](https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/sites/oes/assets/File/Climate%20Equity%20Indicators%20Report_2021.pdf)
- **Cincinnati Urban Heat Island Assessment (2020)**  
[https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/sites/oes/assets/File/Summary\\_Report\\_Heat\\_Watch\\_Cincinnati.pdf](https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/sites/oes/assets/File/Summary_Report_Heat_Watch_Cincinnati.pdf)
- **Cincinnati Urban Tree Canopy Dashboard (ongoing)**  
<https://cagisportal.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/077c8ec66d68459a94d3a7091c5a4938>
- **Climate Safe Resilience Plans (2021-2022)**  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JmTqg7MCSuCPC7FeJhs546JlqCT7wiRM/ClimateSafeResiliencePlans.pdf>
- **Climate Safe Neighborhoods Dashboard (ongoing)**  
<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/31400af144f34931857fa9e59032b252>
- **Climate Safe Community Series Report Out**  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ykdAFWzFNNBCV64unYAICJdmeOnGsBq/view>

## National

- **Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (2022 and evolving)**  
<https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>
- **J40 Factsheet (2022)**  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6142a05674d68a2072918ee1/t/616f53b633c6c4576ca14d59/163468588>
- **Making Justice40 a Reality for Frontline Communities report (2021)**  
<https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/luskin-justice40-final-web-1.pdf>

The leadership of the GCP looks forward to sharing tools that emerge to guide the focusing of efforts on priority communities as we move forward.